

FOR THE CANDID AND THOUGHTFUL NO. 1517

A SERMON
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
PREACHED AT THE THURSDAY EVENING LECTURE AT THE
METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly,
He said unto him, You are not far from the kingdom of God.”
Mark 12:34.*

THIS man began with Christ as a foe and he ended as a friend. It does not quite appear from Mark, but it is plainly stated by Matthew that the scribe asked a question of the Savior, “tempting Him.” He was therefore an enemy. Put the mildest sense you like on the word “tempt,” and it will retain the idea of an unfriendly testing. Yet nothing could be more hearty in the end than the verdict with which he commended our Lord’s answer, “Well, Master, You have said the truth.” Our Lord Jesus Christ has an almighty power over men’s minds. He possesses irresistible charms by which He turns adversaries into advocates. He has a secret key which fits the wards of human hearts and He can open that which seems to be the most securely closed against Him. “Never man spoke like this man,” for in His voice, even in His humiliation, there were traces of the eternal decree which of old spoke the primeval midnight into noon.

It strikes me that this scribe was half-hearted in the work of tempting our Lord, even at the first. I should imagine him to have been a very superior man amongst his fellows, a man of greater light and discernment than the rest and of greater ability in statement and discussion. Possibly for this cause his brother scribes selected him and put him forward to ask the testing questions. Now, it will sometimes happen that a man is thrust forward by others to do what he would never have thought of doing on his own accord and quite unwillingly, he acts as the mouthpiece of a set of people whom he half despises. Our Lord Jesus Christ is a ready reader of human hearts and He very soon discovers whether what a man does is being done of himself or whether he is acted upon by a power behind. He discerns the difference between the malicious adversary and the less guilty victim of circumstances. These words of mine may be reaching persons, who have opposed a religious movement or fought against a gracious truth, not because they themselves would have done so if they had been left alone, but others have egged them on and made use of them and thus they have been drawn or driven into a false position. The people whom they have been accustomed to lead have led them—it is too often the fate of leaders. The circle of which they have been the center and the head has imprisoned its own apparent master and made him captive so that he fights against that which, in his heart he half suspects to be right. If, even now, he could be set free from his surroundings, he would side with the right. Friend, my blessed Master can read your heart and understand the pressure under which you are acting. I pray that as He reads your inmost soul He may see what of good there remains among the evil and deliver you out of the false and dangerous position into which you have drifted. Jesus can set you right, my friend—can take you away from the entanglements of your surroundings, sever you from those who are making a tool of you, but who are at the same time sinking you down to their own level. Jesus can bring you to be His own friend and lift you up to His own standard so that you too shall be the champion of everything that is good and true and shall go forward with Him as your Master, bearing His cross and looking to wear His crown.

Although the scribe in the narrative before us appeared first under the aspect of an antagonist and tried to tempt our Lord, yet before long the great Teacher had put him into such a mental condition that Jesus said of him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” At this time I shall first notice *the commendation which is here expressed*, and then, in the second place, I shall dwell for a little while upon *the question which is here suggested*—suggested, I think, by no idle curiosity, but very naturally suggested—Did this man, who was so near to the kingdom, actually enter it or did he not?

I. May the Holy Spirit instruct and impress us while, first, we consider the COMMENDATION EXPRESSED—“You are not far from the kingdom of God.” I am not going to use this text after the usual

fashion. It has been made the heading of a catalog of characters who are supposed to be not far from the kingdom of God. It is a very proper thing to address hopeful persons and to give descriptions of conditions about which there is much that is cheering and yet much to create anxiety, but the text itself does not deal with many cases, but with one whom Jesus judged to be not far from the kingdom of God, of whom it gives us such information that we see why he was thus spoken of. It speaks of one particular individual, “*You* are not far from the kingdom of God,” and it tells us that Jesus said this because He saw that the scribe answered discreetly. We may infer without fear of mistake that any man who would answer as this man answered is not far from the kingdom of God. Let us read his answer, “Master, You have said the truth; for there is one God and there is none other but He; and to love Him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the soul and with all the strength and to love his neighbor as himself is more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices.”

With care let us investigate this reply and see how far it might be our own language. The first point in which our Savior saw that the scribe was not far from the kingdom of God was this, that *he possessed candor* and possessed so much of it that he rose superior to party considerations. He was a scribe and naturally he took the side of the scribes and Pharisees, but still he was not so much a scribe and Pharisee that he would follow them against the truth. He kept himself open to conviction and as soon as the Savior had given a fitting answer to the question, he did not, as other Pharisees would have done, sneer at Him and continue still to pick fresh holes in His coat, but like a candid man, he said, “Well, Master, You have answered rightly.” And thus he did, as it were, separate himself from the unjust and bigoted party for whom he had been the temporary spokesman. He did not declare himself to be a disciple of Christ, yet he gave the great Teacher His due and said of Him what he felt bound to say, namely, that He had answered rightly. Now, my brethren, there is always some hope for a man who is candid and there is more hope still of one who, being placed by circumstances amongst the bigoted and prejudiced, nevertheless, breaks away from bondage, keeps a clear conscience, preserves his eye from total blindness, is willing to see light if light is to be had, and is anxious to know the truth if the truth can be brought before him. It gives me great delight to meet with such persons, even though they confess that they are of a skeptical turn of mind, when it is clear that they are ready to yield to evidence and are not mere quibblers. Time is wasted upon men who have made up their minds or who have no minds to make up, but inquirers are worth the trouble and those who will admit right and truth when they see it are among the most hopeful of hearers. We do not wish people to open their mouths and shut their eyes and swallow everything that we may like to give them, yet the mouth ought to be open, or at least willing to be opened, as well as the eye, or our service at the gospel feast will be a weary task. When hearers are willing to receive the truth as well as to examine what they hear, they are in a good state. They will not only “prove all things,” which a great many will do, but they are ready also to “hold fast that which is good,” which some will not do. Among such persons was the scribe.

I will suppose that I am addressing one who has been brought up under a system which makes little of Christ. Perhaps your form of religion makes much of the priest and of sacraments, but it does not say much of the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. There are faiths which make more of human things than of our divine Savior, the blessed Redeemer of sinners, and it may be that you profess one of these. Or you may have up to now lived under a religion which makes much of your good works and doings and feelings and so on. It may be that the Lord will enable you to rise superior to the influence of creeds, of education, and of association, and to say, “I only wish to know God’s way of salvation. My desire is to be guided by what the Lord has revealed. I am prepared to accept whatever is plainly taught in the Word of God, even should it reverse all my former beliefs and deprive me of my most cherished consolations. With a sincere heart I ask enlightenment from the divine Spirit.” Now, when we meet with a man of that kind and see him hearing the gospel, we may say of him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” These are the kind of people who feel the force of truth and are converted to the faith of Jesus. These are straightforward people, these hearty lovers of that which is good. The Savior called some men, “honest and good ground,” and they were such even before the seed of the word fell upon them. Of course, even this natural openness and sincerity of character is God’s gift, but assuredly these are the people upon whom the heavenly work takes most effect. Your tricksters, shufflers, players, make-believes, and men without principle or heart are seldom converted. I speak from wide observation. I have seen scores of blustering blasphemers who were downright in their profanity, brought to Jesus’ feet, but I do not re-

member seeing a deceitful person brought there. Your deeply lying character—I will not say that it is beyond the power of grace to save him, but I will say this, it is the rarest thing under heaven for a man who has long been a liar to be converted. I will say nothing in the praise of human nature, nor give any reason for the absolutely free election of grace, but still I notice that for the most part, there is a sort of honest openness and freedom from trickery about those whom the Lord calls to Himself. I notice that characteristic of the first fishermen apostles, who were no doubt ignorant and weak, but they were as transparent as glass and as free from guile as Nathanael. Even in their follies and their sins and their blunders, they were always open-hearted and so, in general, are those upon whom the Lord looks with an eye of love. Tricksters come in like Judas, but they go out again, for they are not of us. They experience no change from their association with godliness or from their knowledge of truth, but would pick the purse of Christ Himself and sell their Redeemer for pieces of silver. Far otherwise is it with a man of candid and thorough spirit, for he is glad to receive the gospel and it soon displays its gracious power in him. We may say of the candid man as Christ did of this scribe, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.”

A second point is, perhaps, even more clear. This man also *possessed spiritual knowledge*. It is a great error to suppose that ignorance can do anybody any good. There is a religion which prefers to have ignorant people to deal with, but we have learned the truth of what Solomon said, “The soul without knowledge, it is not good.” To be ignorant of the law of God is to be far off from the kingdom, and to be ignorant of the gospel is also to be in a measure far off from the kingdom, but this man knew the law and knew it well. He had a spiritual appreciation of its range, meaning, and spirituality. Notice how he puts it, for he puts it well. He says, “To love God with all the heart and with all the understanding, and with all the soul and with all the strength—this is the first commandment.” Here we see, first, that he mentions *sincere love*, in the words, “to love Him with all the heart.” God is to be loved, not in name, not with lip language, not with mere pretense, but with the heart. God requires, by His law, the hearty obedience of His creatures. Next, the scribe puts it, “With all your understanding.” That is, God deserves and demands the *intelligent* love of His creatures. He does not ask blind love of them—He desires them to know something of Him and of His works and of His claims upon them, so as to love Him because He deserves their affection. The understanding must justify and impel the affections. Then he puts it, “with all your soul.” That is, with the *emotional nature*. Love God with feeling—not coolly—but with the whole force of your feeling. Love Him with your soul, for soul-love is the soul of love. And then he adds, “and with all your strength.” That is to say, *intensity* is to be thrown into our love to God. We are to serve Him with all our might and throw all our energy into His worship. Thus he gives us, under four heads, a description of the kind of love which the law of God requires of us—sincere—“with all your heart.” Intelligent—“with all your understanding.” Emotional—“with all your soul.” Intense and energetic—“with all your strength.” This the scribe knew and it was most valuable knowledge. Beloved, when a man begins intelligently to grasp the doctrines of the law and the gospel, when we perceive that he is no stranger to divine things, but that he can give a reason for his beliefs, and can state them to others—although we dare not conclude because of this knowledge that such a man is actually in the kingdom of God, we may safely conclude that he is not far from it. Give us candor and let that candor be attended with enlightenment and we are sure that the possessor of these things is not far from the kingdom of God.

A third point is more remarkable still, because it is to be feared that hundreds of professed Christians are nothing like so near to the kingdom of heaven as this man was. This scribe *knew the superiority of an inward religion over that which is external*, for he declares, “To love Him with all your heart is more than whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” Thousands at this hour are publicly teaching us that the principal point of religion is that you shall be duly and properly baptized and confirmed, and shall reverently and properly receive the sacrament. They lay stress upon your receiving before you have your breakfast and upon the breaker of the sacred bread having been duly touched on the head by a bishop and I do not know what else of mere outward circumstance. Books have been written about how the service is to be performed and how it is not to be performed and a great noise has been made about a piece of bread which was brought before a court of law. I believe a very great dignitary has been so weak as to certify that this baked dough has been “reverently consumed” and yet this is not a heathen country, nor are we worshippers of fetishes! Great importance is attached to the style of garment which should be worn by

priests on Holy Monday or Good Friday. Colors vary according to the almanac and the age of the moon. I must confess I need all my gravity when I think of vestments and girdles and surplices and gowns being matters of serious discussion. Surely these poor dupes of superstition are far, very far from the kingdom of God, which is not meat and drink, nor clothing, nor posture, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Their whole line of thought is alien to the mind of God who is a Spirit and must be worshipped in spirit and in truth. In the whole business of exhibition religion, what is there to content the soul? What can there be in it to please God? If our God were a royal puppet, I could conceive of His being pleased with ceremonial or if He were like the heathens' idiotic deities, I could understand that mummeries, masquerades, postures, processions, robes, and round-robins might please Him, but seeing that He is God, the only wise, be it far from me to dream of such a thing. Such child's play can scarcely be borne by full-grown men, but for that glorious mind that fills all immensity to be thought to be particular about the cut and color of a vestment seems to me to be little short of blasphemy. When the thing was typical of the truth yet to be revealed, it was important, but now that the true light has risen and the shadows have departed, no such explanation is possible. Can it really be true that courts of law and assemblies of the church discuss the question of men's turning to the east or to the west when they pray? Is it thought to be of some consequence how men shall turn and twist and bend? What god is this that they serve? What being is this that they adore? Certainly not Jehovah, the God of heaven, whom we worship, for He "dwells not in temples made with hands," that is to say, of this building, and He has abolished all rules save this—"They that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." Only spiritual worship is worship and only as the heart adores does God accept the homage which is offered to Him. This scribe knew that even whole burnt offerings, though God had ordained them and they were therefore right, and sacrifices, though the law had settled them and they were therefore due, were nothing when compared with loving God with all the heart and with all the soul. He expresses most plainly that "to love God with all the heart is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." And see how broadly he puts it, "All whole burnt offerings and sacrifices" put together. If they could slay all the bullocks upon a thousand hills and set Lebanon itself on fire, making it one huge altar upon which the holocaust should smoke, and even if they should pour out rivers of oil and side by side with it ran streams of blood of fat beasts, yet all would be nothing. Who has required this at their hands? The Lord's demands are not of this sort. "Sacrifice and offering You would not." What God asks is that we should love Him first of all and our neighbor as ourselves. Now, a man who has come so far as to shake off the superstition of confidence in external worship is not far from the kingdom of God. He who knows that if saved it will be by a spiritual change and not by going to a place of worship, not by repeating prayers, not by joining a church, not by being baptized, not by taking the sacrament, knows more than many, and he who also knows that loving God with all his heart is an absolutely necessary evidence of his being a child of God, and longs to feel that love, is not far from the kingdom. A sense of the value and necessity of spiritual religion is a most hopeful sign. I do not say that it is a sure sign of saving grace, but I am sure it is a token of being very near the kingdom. Oh that the man would take the one step which is now needed by turning his knowledge into practice! Oh that he would believe with all his heart and live!

Another point is manifest in this man's confession; *he saw very plainly the supremacy of God over the whole of our manhood*. It was clear to him that there was but one God and that man was made on purpose to be one and undivided in His service. He perceived that man should love, honor, and serve that one God with all his heart, with all his understanding, with all his soul, and with all his strength. Do you know that, dear friend? Come now, if you are not a saved man, I will ask you—do you recognize this to be true—that it is your bounden duty to serve your God with all your heart and understanding and soul and strength? Do you admit this? If you do and if you are an honest man, you are not far from the kingdom of God, because honest men earnestly endeavor to pay their debts, and when they find that they cannot, they are distressed. If you are in distress of mind because you cannot meet your obligations to God, then you are not far from the kingdom. I rejoice in your discovery of shortcoming, failure, and inability, for these lie near that hearty penitence which is the sister of saving faith and the sure herald of joy and peace. When a man feels his own inability to do as he ought, when he trembles before the law which, nevertheless, he honors and admits to be just and right, then he is not far from self-renunciation and from accepting that matchless righteousness which Jesus Christ has come to bring. A consciousness of the supremacy of the sovereignty of God over us, so that He ought to have every thought, every

breath, every pulse is the work of the Spirit, who thereby convicts us of sin and it is a sweet sign of dawn in the once darkened soul. Admit that God ought to be heartily loved and you are not far from loving Him. Feel that you are guilty for not loving and the seeds of love are in your heart.

Once more only. Although this hopeful scribe recognized the value of spiritual religion and the need of heart-work and of the heart being wholly given to God, *yet he did not despise outward religion so far as it was commanded of God*. He says that to love God is better than whole burnt offerings and sacrifices—which was an admission that these things were good in their places. He was no rejecter of ceremonies which are commanded because of the superstition of will-worshippers who invent ceremonies. We are not to give up the baptism of believers because of the unscriptural rite of infant sprinkling, nor to forsake the Lord's Supper because of the popish "mass." Ordinances of God are good in their places and what is to be dreaded is the perversion of them by thrusting them into the place of better and more important matters. Thus the scribe showed a well-balanced mind all round and proved himself not far from the kingdom of God.

My dear friend, are you prepared to lay hold of the truth wherever you find it? Are you prepared to break away from party ties and family prejudices? Are you prepared to believe that the inward and spiritual part of religion is infinitely superior to the external part of it, be it right or be it wrong? Do you also admit the divine supremacy of God and His right to you in all respects? And are you willing to take ordinances, such as He has ordained, in their place and not out of it? Then, if all these things are in you, your character resembles that of this scribe, of whom Jesus said, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." I am right glad to meet with you, for you are not far from submitting to the divine authority since you are already found admitting its right to you. I trust you are not far from entering into the realm of spiritual religion, for you already value it. You are not far from the privilege of being wholly renewed in heart since you see the need of it. How glad I am that you should be now listening to the gospel! Happier still shall I be if God shall help me to say the right word to you at this good hour. The Lord send it!

II. Our second point is THE QUESTION SUGGESTED—*this man came so near to the kingdom, did he ever enter it?* We do not know. If anybody were to assert that he did not, I should be ready to question his statement. If anybody were to declare that he did, I should at once demand his authority for the assertion. We receive no information from the Scriptures and it is always better, where the Word of God is silent, to be silent ourselves. We should also observe another very good rule if you have to judge of a man's state and know but little of it, always judge it favorably. Judges usually give a prisoner the benefit of the doubt and when a man is not a prisoner, when he has come so far towards grace as this scribe, let us at any rate hope that he did enter into the kingdom.

I see no reason why he should not have done so and that is my first answer to the question. He should have done so. Having come so far, there were many doors by which, God's Spirit being with him, he might have entered into the kingdom. I mean doors of thought by which the Holy Spirit would readily have led his candid mind into the faith of Christ. I will show you one. There was in later years another scribe, a rabbi—you will recollect his name—who said, "I consent unto the law, that it is good; but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." You see the process of thought. It is a very simple one. This scribe sees the law of God to be a spiritual law, demanding the obedience of his heart, his understanding, his soul, and his strength. If he had thought awhile, he would, as a candid man, have said, "I have not kept this law. What is more, I cannot keep it. If I try to keep it, I find something within me against which I struggle, but which, nevertheless, brings me into captivity to another law—a law of selfishness, a law of sin." Then, as a man anxious to be right, he would have said, "How can I be delivered? Oh that I might be set free to keep the law of God! I cannot abide in this bondage. I ought to keep this law. I shall never be happy till I love God with all my heart, for He ought to be so loved and I perceive that there can be no heaven to a heart which does not love God intensely, for this is one of the essentials of peace and rest. How can I get at it?" In such a condition as that, if he had heard the sweet invitation of our Lord, "Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest," would he not have leaped at the sound? Do you not see the simple doorway for such a man as that to become a Christian? He had come so far that surely he should come a little farther. Let us trust that he did. At any rate, if any of you have come so far, may God's sweet Spirit lead you to take those other steps

and to enter into the kingdom, submitting to the sweet sovereignty of Prince Immanuel, whose scepter is of silver and whose servitude is an honor and a delight to all His subjects.

That is one door; now follow with me another track. Suppose this man had really loved God with all his heart and understanding and soul and strength—I will not say perfectly, for that would be supposing an impossibility—but supposing that he had truly and sincerely loved God, he could not have been an hour in the company of the Lord Jesus without feeling the deepest union of heart to Him. Would he not have exclaimed, “This man, too, loves God with all His heart”? He must have perceived it, for the zeal which Christ had for the Father was immeasurable. It flashed in every gleam of His eye. It tintured every word that fell from His lips. Jesus lived for God and glorified the Father with all His heart and soul and any person who truly loved God would soon have perceived that fact. “Ah!” he would have exclaimed, “here is one who loves God better than I do. Here is one who honors God more than I do. Here is one who is more consecrated, more devoted, more godlike than I am.” By that door he would have been led to admiration of Jesus, to communion with Him, and ultimately to belief in Him as the Messiah. Let us hope that the scribe was so led, for the way is plain enough. At any rate, if God in His grace has led any man here to love the Father, I am persuaded that he will love the Son, for he that loves Him that begat, loves Him also that is begotten of Him. My hearer, you are certainly not far from the kingdom of God if you have come so far as to love God, even though you know little as yet of His only-begotten Son. God help you to take that one other step.

Here is another door. You notice that he said that to love God was more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices. Now, suppose that with that in his mind, he had sat down and said, “This loving God is the main thing. Why, then, is the law encumbered with burnt offerings and sacrifices? If they really are inferior to the moral precepts and especially to the spiritual precepts, why are they there at all?” Then I think he would have seen that they must be there for a spiritual purpose. And suppose he had begun to try and read the meaning of the paschal lamb, or of the daily lamb, or of the sin-offering? Why, I think if he turned to that blessed fifty-third chapter of Isaiah and began to read it in order to understand the sacrifices of the old law, it would have happened to him as it did to the eunuch when Philip opened to him the Scriptures—he would have seen Jesus in them all. He must have seen Him. And if you, dear friend, have come to see the right place of gospel ordinances through candidly searching out their meaning, you have seen that their whole teaching is Christ Jesus, the sacrifice for sin. There is nothing in the two great gospel ordinances but Christ. Christ’s sufferings, death, burial, and resurrection set forth in baptism. Christ’s death set forth until He comes at the communion table—life given us by our Savior’s death and life sustained by the same means. Jesus is the body of the ordinances of the Old Testament and the soul of those of the New. If you are but candid enough to desire to push through the veil and get at the real meaning of every outward ordinance, you will see Jesus before long.

There is another road by which the scribe might have been led to the Savior. Think again. Suppose that he had continued to glow and burn with love to God. As that love grew, the understanding would also become enlightened with it and the soul would rise towards God. You know why that would be? It must be because the Holy Spirit was in the man, for no man loves God or strives to love God with all his heart and understanding and soul and strength without there being, in secret and unknown to him, a divine power at the back impelling him in that direction. Now, do you think that the Holy Spirit would thus work in the man and not reveal Christ to him for his salvation? I cannot believe it. I am persuaded that, coming as that man did under the gospel of Christ, he would be, by his candor, by his love of God, by the influence of the divine Spirit, in such a state of mind that, as when sparks fall upon dry tinder they ignite at once, so would the words of Jesus fall upon a mind prepared of the Spirit of God. That scribe was therefore not far from the kingdom of God. I do hope that there are some such hearts present at this hour. Some of you, I trust, can say, “Oh that I had Christ! I would give my eyes for Him.” If you mean that, why do you not have Him? He is to be had for nothing. “Oh,” says another, “I would die if I might have Him and be saved.” Why not live and be saved? “Oh, but I would give anything.” Why not leave off the idea of giving and take freely what Jesus presents to you? But yet that very desire of yours—that longing of yours—proves that you are not far from the kingdom of God. My heart’s desire is that as you have come so far, you may now yield yourselves up to Jesus. That is the way of salvation; have done with self-salvation and let Jesus save you. When a man is in the water, if he kicks and struggles, he will drown, but if he lies still, he will float. When another comes to help, if he will be passive,

he will be saved, but all that he can do will hinder his deliverance. Be passive in the hands of Christ till He gives you life to be active with. Be nothing and let Him be everything. Trust Him wholly and alone. Drop into His arms and let Him bear the weight of your sins and sorrows and it shall not be said of you any longer that you are not far from the kingdom of God, but it shall be sung on earth and in heaven, "He has returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of souls, glory be to God!"

Still, as I have said, there is the dark supposition that *perhaps the scribe never did enter the kingdom*. He may have been so near to the kingdom and yet he may have lacked the one thing necessary. If it were so, it was a grievous fact and all we can do now is to profit by it. What could have been the reason why he did not enter the kingdom? I cannot tell, we know so little of him, but if we might infer from the little we do know, I should suppose that if he did not enter it was from the unworthy motive of being swayed by his fellow men. We judged that when he came to Christ to put the question, he came not of his own mind and motion. We began by thinking that he seemed half-hearted in his opposition and that so he the more readily turned from a questioner into a candid admirer. It is, however, just possible that being the spokesman for others, he had grown fond of taking the lead. And if he did not really enter the kingdom, it may have been because he would have lost his place in the front rank of the scribes and Pharisees and this was too great a price to pay for truth and righteousness. I have known a man deeply impressed with religious things and feeling his way aright, but a little company of half a dozen whom he met in the evening, of whom he was the leading spirit, have sufficed to hold him in bondage. They invite him to come again. They miss his genial society, his jest, his song, his merry talk. He cannot face it out and tell them that he has a call elsewhere, a call to nobler things. He has not the resolute will to lead them in another direction and dreads even to make the attempt. He wants to be the leading man and so he gives up what his conscience suggests to him rather than not be the leader of men whom, in his heart, he must know to be unworthy of such homage. In his own mind he thinks them fools, but still he is afraid that they should think him so and therefore he becomes a greater and guiltier fool than they. Oh, that fear of men, that fear of men! You may meet with here and there a man of the better sort who begins to feel, "Yes, there is the light there—light worth having." He breaks away from his party and its surroundings and for a while is eager for the truth, which he has half discovered, but he fears the cold shoulder which society would give him, dreads the jeer of "Sir John," and the sneer of "My Lord." The half-opened eye is closed with saddest determination from fear of other children of darkness who would mock at its better sight. This is a sight which might make an angel weep. Jesus is sold, but not for so much as clinked in the hand of Judas. He is bartered for a fool's smile and for the company of the vain and frivolous. Ah me, that ever the sun should behold so dread a sight! Multitudes who know the truth and are not far from the kingdom of God, nevertheless, never enter it because of the fear of man, the love of approbation, the horror of being laughed at and jested at. With such vile fetters, immortal souls are bound for execution and held back from everlasting blessedness. There is something very beautiful about many a young man of inquiring mind and if you could transplant him and set him in another soil, you might make something of him, but not in that shop where all his fellows would make him the butt of their mirth if he were really a Christian, not in that work room where all the artisans would swear and chaff if he were but to avow his half-formed convictions. Want of courage, want of self-denial, is that fatal flaw which ruins what otherwise would have been a gem in the Redeemer's crown. All brave hearts mournfully pronounce that he is justly lost who is not bold enough to own his Savior and the truth—

*"I had as life not be, as live to be
In awe of such a thing as I myself."*

Afraid of another man! Am I then myself a man? Or am I but the mere mockery of manhood? Oh, sirs, let your manhood come to the rescue. God grant you grace to say, "What can it matter to me what men say as long as I am right?" They cannot break bones with their jests, and if they did, there have been Christians who have not only suffered the breaking of their bones, but the burning of their whole bodies for Christ's sake sooner than deny His sacred claims. What did Jesus say? "He that loses his life for My sake shall find it." He who, to gain the whole world, would keep back a solitary truth, is a huge loser for his pains. He is mean and base and not worthy to be numbered amongst those who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. Oh! if I speak to one who hesitates, let me remind him that however it may look to-night to be a daring step to be decided for Christ, it will look very differently soon when the great trumpet shall sound and ring over earth and sea and the dead shall rise and the judgment seat shall be set and

the great white throne shall be unveiled. Then it will be seen to be a far more desperate daring to deny the Lord even to save life itself. What will the cowards do in that day who, to please men, forsook their Lord? What will they do who suppressed truth and stifled conscience when the Shepherd begins to divide the goats and the sheep from each other? Yes, what will they do who find themselves driven with the goats, though once they half decided to be numbered with the sheep? They were near the fold, but never entered. What will they feel when He shall say, “Depart! Depart! I know you not. You knew not Me in the day of My humiliation. You were ashamed of Me in the world. You blushed at My name. You covered up what was in your conscience in order to avoid man’s laughter and rebuke. You knew not Me and now I know not you. Depart! Depart!” In proportion to the light against which you have shut your eyes will be your horror when that light shall blind you into eternal night. In proportion to the violence which you have done to your consciences will be the terror which your awakened conscience will work in you. In proportion to the nearness of the kingdom within which you came shall be the dreadful distance to which you will be driven.

I was thinking that, if the Lord were to pay men in their own coin, what an awful thing it would be if those who are now not far from the kingdom were told by the Lord, “You shall stay there forever. You, who heard the gospel and did not accept it, must stay where you are.” Halt sir! Not a step more! Close to the gates of heaven—you stop there! To hear its music forever and to gnash your teeth forever because you cannot join in it! To hear the songs of the righteous, while you wail forever! To know the brightness of bliss, but to be in the black darkness forever! To be within an inch of heaven and yet in hell! The living water flowing at your feet and yet your tongue forever parched! The bread of life near at hand and yet you cannot eat! Oh, think of it! Eternally not far from the kingdom! If you would not wish to be so, oh, be not out of Christ another minute! May God’s Spirit enable you to leap right away from your undecided condition into living faith and loving obedience to Christ—

*“So near to the kingdom! Yet what do you lack?
So near to the kingdom! What keeps you back?
Renounce every idol, though dear it may be
And come to the Savior now pleading with thee.”*

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON

DEAR FRIENDS—Nothing remains to report to you but my hope of being in my own pulpit on February 8. I beg you to join with me in thanks to the healing Lord for this restoration. The Lord brings down to the grave and raises up again, and to Him be praise forever.

It would be a great favor to me personally, and a means of good to many if the readers of the sermons would aid in increasing their circulation. They are already very widely scattered, but if twice the number could be sent abroad, we might look for double fruit. After standing the test of twenty-five years, the Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit may be pardoned if it asks those who profit by the sermons to introduce them to others.

May future discourses be fuller of unction and power, and so may you, dear readers, reap a harvest from my pains and sicknesses.

Yours ever heartily,

C. H. SPURGEON

Mentone, January 22, 1880

Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Version 1.0, Ages Software.

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